

Testimony of Maurice Williamson
President, Williamson Consulting
Before the House Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health, regarding
*Issues Affecting Forest Health and Management in Eastern Washington-
National Forests, Tribal Lands, and Local Communities*
August 29, 2005

Mr. Chairman, Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to comment on this matter. I have practiced forestry in the inland west for over thirty years. In addition to contract work for various governmental entities, including US Forest Service, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and the Bureau Land Management, I have completed contract work for all of the major industrial operators in Northeast Washington and have a private non-industrial client base numbering well over 600.

Over the years I have participated in and attended various symposiums, continuing education programs, and policy level problem solving efforts with regard to forest health. Recently, I participated on the Forest Health Study Group enabled by 2nd Substitute Senate Bill 6144 in 2004 and was appointed to the group by the Public Lands Commissioner.

I have observed, during my 35 year career, the ongoing forest health crisis from both the field forester perspective and in policy level discussions.

It is my opinion that Northeast Washington affords the best opportunity for implementing the Healthy Forest Initiative and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act. My opinion is based on the following factors:

- We do have a significant forest health problem in Eastern Washington as identified by 2nd Substitute Senate Bill 6144 and a preponderance of data gathered by the US Forest Service and others.
- We have the infrastructure (processing facilities) to utilize the small diameter previously sub-merchantable material that many areas of the Inland West have lost.
- There are reputed to be more private forest landowners in Stevens County than any other county west of the Mississippi. These people can be allies both in accomplishing a comprehensive forest health project and in assisting the education process for the general public.
- We have an established coalition of stakeholders (Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition)

to participate with the Forest Service on collaborative processes.

- The Northeast Washington counties (Pend Oreille, Stevens and Ferry) are in the process of doing countywide fire plans.
- The Northeast Washington Region of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources has a successful ongoing program within the Wildland Urban Interface for protection of lives and structures.

I would like to stress the importance of an effective public lands forest health program to the small private forest landowners.

- It is acknowledged by experts that insects and disease cannot be managed on a ownership by ownership basis. There are approximately 1,100 miles of Colville National Forest boundary that are adjacent to other owners. This is unlike many other Forests that are more blocked up with regular boundaries and few inholdings. Private and State landowners/managers cannot effectively control insects and diseases on their properties when their adjacent Forest Service neighbor does not.
- Private landowners have enjoyed high market values for their products since the federal timber supplies have decreased due to the timber wars, appeals, and litigation. However, our processing facilities capacity out strip the available wood supply by some estimates as much as 50 million feet per year. This differential can be directly attributed to the decrease in budgeted sale quantity on the Colville Forest during the last ten years. If the Forest Service supply does not increase we will lose additional markets, as we have in Ferry County, which will result in lower economic return to forest landowners and subsequent conversion of those lands to other more profitable uses. Washington State recognizes the importance of private forest lands to the State's economy, ecological well being, and quality of life. It is not in the State's interest or the private forest landowner's interest to see Federal lands unmanaged.

Data gathered and accessed by the Forest Service indicates 200,000 acres of National Forest land is within what is called the Wildland Urban Interface, where fires can endanger the lives and property of private citizens. Additionally, over 15 years ago, a study accomplished by the Forest Service titled "CROP" indicated some 300,000 acres of the Colville National Forest was in overstocked fire regenerated stands. Additional studies indicate many more acres are in some degree of jeopardy regarding forest health and fire suppression issues. If these acres total a conservative a half million, and the Colville Forest continues to be budgeted for and accomplish forest health remedies on 6,000 acres per year, it would take 83 years to affect change on the Colville Forest. I do not believe we have 83 years. I suggest you look at ways to accelerate our activities to accomplish forest health restoration on a half million acres over a 20 year time frame. This means we need programs that can accomplish restoration on 25,000 acres per year. (See Map 1 - NE Washington Forest Health)

Congresswoman's McMorris' office supplied me with a list of questions that her staff felt the Subcommittee would like to have answered:

The following is my attempt at answering questions posed during a conversation between Shelly Short and subcommittee staff for the August 29, 2005 Subcommittee Hearing held in Colville, Washington.

Question 1: **Are HFI and the HFRA being implemented?** I believe they are, however, much of what is currently underway is a reformatting of ongoing green timber sale projects to comply with and be facilitated by HFRA. **What in terms of acres treated?** I do not know exactly how many projects are in the pipeline. Apparently the Burnt Valley Project is approximately 1,000 acres and is to the point where actual treatments are taking place. The Forest Service tells us they are budgeted to be able to accomplish $6,000 \pm$ acres a year. **What has been the role of industry in those treatments?** Industry, particularly Vaagen Bros, has “bent over backwards”, as demonstrated by the fact that Vaagen Bros was the only bidder on the Burnt Valley Stewardship Project. I am being told this sale will result in a negative return to Vaagen Brothers and that they undertook the project to keep the concept of HFI and HFRA from being viewed as a failure. Additionally, there has been considerable time donated by other industry personnel to the ongoing efforts of the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition to collaborate with and assist the Colville National Forest in its planning and implementation of HFI and HFRA.

Question 2: **What solutions are needed in the long run to implement these acts?** I believe these acts can be useful tools in assisting the Forest Service in accomplishing restoration activities. The major changes that need to be made in the Forest Service will take administrative, and perhaps legislative, enablement to change the culture of the service. While I have a small business of my own, I do not pretend to be an expert in business organization and employee motivation. I have some suggestions for items for the experts to consider.

- The current situation is a bureaucratic response to a myriad of congressional and administrative actions over an extensive period of time. Congress should consider reviewing, consolidating, and prioritizing all congressional and administrative actions to come up with a clear map for the Forest Service to follow. This may involve the very contentious process of altering some major legislation and administrative actions. But without this clear map the Forest Service may continue to wander aimlessly in trying to be responsive to each new direction, while understanding that the direction may change with the next administration or congress.
- The Forest Service Supervisor position should be more responsible to the forest, perhaps more autonomous. My understanding is that currently the Regional Forest directs the Forest Supervisor “at will”, which results in detached duties, excessive meetings, etc. which keep the “captain of the ship” from sailing the ship, i.e. the individual forest. The Forest Supervisor, as well as many of the key people on the Forest Service staff and District Offices, are mere transients. It is impossible to form an effective team, gain the confidence of the community, understand the goals and objectives on an individual forest basis, and accomplish

those goals and objectives when the average tenure is as brief as it has been, on the Colville Forest, for the past two decades. .

- NEPA has been targeted as part of the problem with regard to forest inactivity. I believe NEPA itself is a useful tool and that the problem is not the NEPA analysis but the appeal and litigation process and subsequent reinterpretation by various judges and litigants of what NEPA analysis should be. Would an administrative law court process be more efficient regarding the litigation portion of the process? It appears that the federal courts that have been hearing these cases are not totally familiar with, or choose to ignore the Counsel on Environmental Quality's directions regarding NEPA. Using administrative law judges who are more specialized and have a clearer and a closer relationship with CEQ may help solve a portion of this problem.
- As questions have been posed by stakeholders and projects have been successfully appealed or litigated the Forest Service's reaction has been for the forest managers to devote resources that should be used for project design and implementation to what amounts to "research" to answer these questions. This not only misdirects those scarce resources but causes managers to loose focus on their prime objective of managing the forest they are responsible for.
- Recommendation: Congress and the USFS should review management versus research responsibilities and design the most efficient structure allowing managers to fulfill their objectives.
- The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition seems to be working and should be encouraged. I have been involved in several of these types of efforts. Some have worked; others haven't. I believe the ones that have worked have been a function of strong leadership among the stakeholders and that a sense of accomplishment, recognition and support is key to their success. As with all volunteer organizations, funding is important. The current Forest Supervisor of the Colville National Forest is supportive of the Coalition's activity and acknowledges their importance.
- A key element, as described by the Forest Health Study Group established by the legislature in Washington State, (copy provided by Senator Morton) is an effective communications plan. As referenced on page 6, "an effective communications plan that informs landowners and managers, forest practitioners, decision makers, and the general public on the importance of healthy forests and the practical ways of achieving healthy forests". Without an effective communication plan there will continue to be a lack of trust, and the Forest Service will continue to be unsuccessful in telling its story. The Forest Service has been out maneuvered consistently in the public media by extremists on both sides of the "environmental wars". A successful communications program will inform the public not only of the necessity to protect the forests but to also gain a clear understanding that they would not only be protecting the trees but many of the non-market values that the passive management approach cannot protect.

- Recommendation: Review current policy/restraints with regard to public information, make necessary adjustments to create and maintain an effective program.

Question 3: **Is the USFS able to use the receipts generated from stewardship sales, etc. effectively? If not, why not?** The first stewardship sale on the Colville National Forest is ongoing. Receipts have not been in place long enough to know whether the Forest Service is using them effectively. It is my understanding that these receipts can be used for restoration activities, and the field preparation for additional projects and, more recently, for monitoring the results of the projects. The bottle-neck for additional work on the Colville Forest is currently in the project planning (evaluation) phase. This activity has not been allowable for expenditures of stewardship funds. I agree that planning in the general sense, as forest plan revision, and other broad planning efforts, should be done by the Forest Service under appropriations granted by Congress. However, planning for a project, including NEPA work, should be considered as part of pre-sales work. I would argue that monitoring, which is currently eligible for stewardship monies, is the responsibility of the Forest Service under Congress' budgeting authority and that pre-sales planning would be more eligible for stewardship money than monitoring. As previously mentioned, the Forest Service has informed us that they are budgeted to accomplish 30MMBF per year¹, while treating approximately 6,000 acres. On the Colville National Forest, the Wildland Urban Interface project alone comprises approximately 200,000 acres. The "CROP Stands" which were identified more than 15 years ago comprise 300,000 of the Colville's 1.1 million acres. There are significant additional acres outside of the wilderness and other exclusionary management areas that do not fit either of these categories but are in need of active treatment by the Forest Service's analysis. (See Photos to follow) Assuming a conservative 500,000 acres of the Colville Forest needs treatment, budgeting for 6,000 acres a year, it would take 83 years to go over those acres one time. It is generally acknowledged that some of these treatments would have to take place periodically (perhaps every 20 to 30 years) to maintain effectiveness. It makes no sense to me to not clear the planning bottle-neck by allowing stewardship monies to be used for planning purposes.

Question 4: **Would like to review post-catastrophic fire treatments. Did salvage take place? What was the timber value? Any impediments to salvage?** Salvage operations have been problematic. The last effort was the Togo Timber Sale which went well and did result in some income (Forest Service can answer amount). There is not agreement within the coalition on fire salvage. It is my understanding the sale would have been appealed had the potential appellant not been confused about the time-line for the appeal process.

Question 5: **Compare/contrast the visual differences between tribal, USFS, state and private land projects.**

US FOREST SERVICE PROJECT



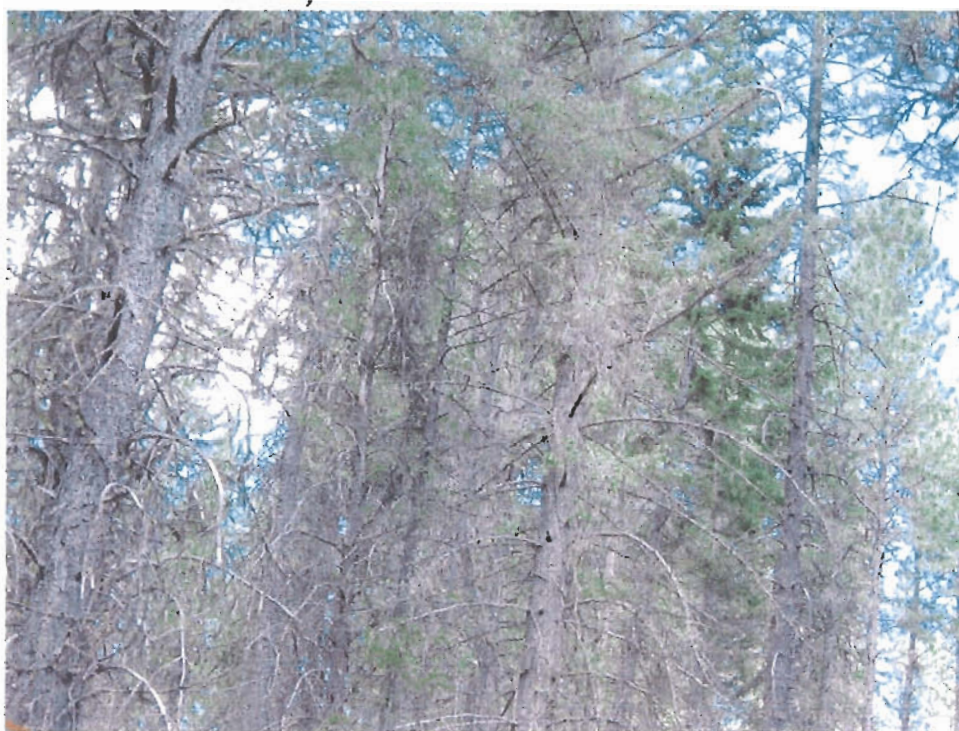
USFS Burnt Valley Stewardship Project - Depicting a unit where acceptable spacing was accomplished. The initial stand of trees were smaller and the upper diameter limitations did not affect spacing adversely.



USFS Burnt Valley Stewardship Project - This pictures shows acceptable crown closure on a unit where upper diameter limit constraints did not affect the acceptable spacing for tree removal.



USFS Burnt Valley Stewardship Project - An area after treatment where upper diameter limit for removal constraints resulted in minor numbers of trees being removed.



USFS Burnt Valley Stewardship Project - Shows ladder fuels still excessive, and crowns too close to prevent spreading crown fire on the same completed unit.



USFS Burnt Valley Stewardship Project - This picture shows dying and diseased trees left on a completed unit due to upper diameter limit for removal constraints.

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PROJECT



Flowery Trail Contract Log Sale by Washington State Department of Natural Resources - Over view of the sale area



Flowery Trail Contract Log Sale by Washington State Department of Natural Resources - Representative picture of the density prevalent prior to operation.



Flowery Trail Contract Log Sale by Washington State Department of Natural Resources - Illustrates the down fuel due to mortality from overstocking.



Flowery Trail Contract Log Sale by Washington State Department of Natural Resources - Trees are cut but not skidded.

PRIVATE LANDOWNER PROJECT



Private Forest Land - Prior to Commercial Harvest Treatment. Note dead and dying trees



Private Forest Land - After Commercial Harvest Treatment

FEDERAL GRANT SUPPORTED PROJECT

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Private Land - Prior to treatment under “Fire Safe” prescriptions



Private Land - Treated under “Fire Safe” prescriptions

“Fire Safe” - a State coordinated, federal grant funded program. To date treatments have occurred on approximately 4,000 acres. Funded to accomplish 700 acres this year. Tentatively funded to accomplish 600 acres next year. (See Map #2)

Staff's questions did not include an assessment of costs for sale preparation but I thought the following information might be useful:

USFS Colville Forest

- Overhead - \$18.42/MBF
- NEPA - \$42.63/MBF
- On the ground sale prep - \$37.30/MBF
- Contract preparation - \$ 1.17/MBF
- Sale Administration - \$25.48/MBF
- Total Allocated by Region - \$125/MBF

Washington State DNR (NE Region)

- All sales total experienced costs - \$55/MBF
 - Forest Health Sales Direct Costs - \$18.21/MBF*
- *does not include overhead and other indirect costs

Private

- Industry information is proprietary but total budget for sale preparation and management is in the 20 – 30% range, which calculates to \$60 – \$100/MBF for sale preparation and

subsequent management activities.

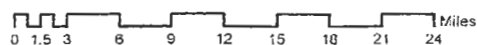
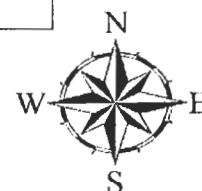
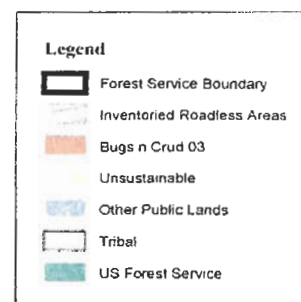
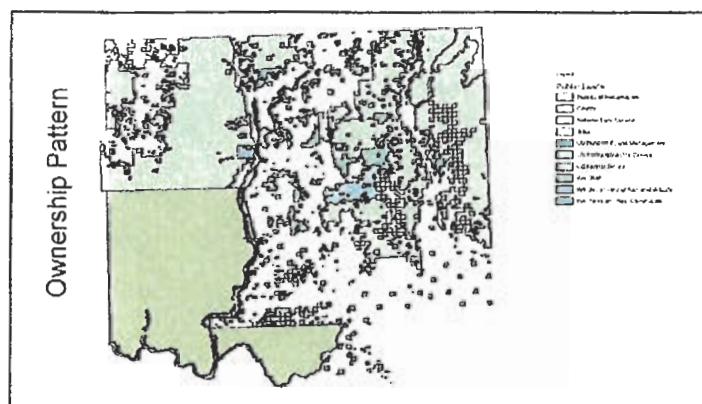
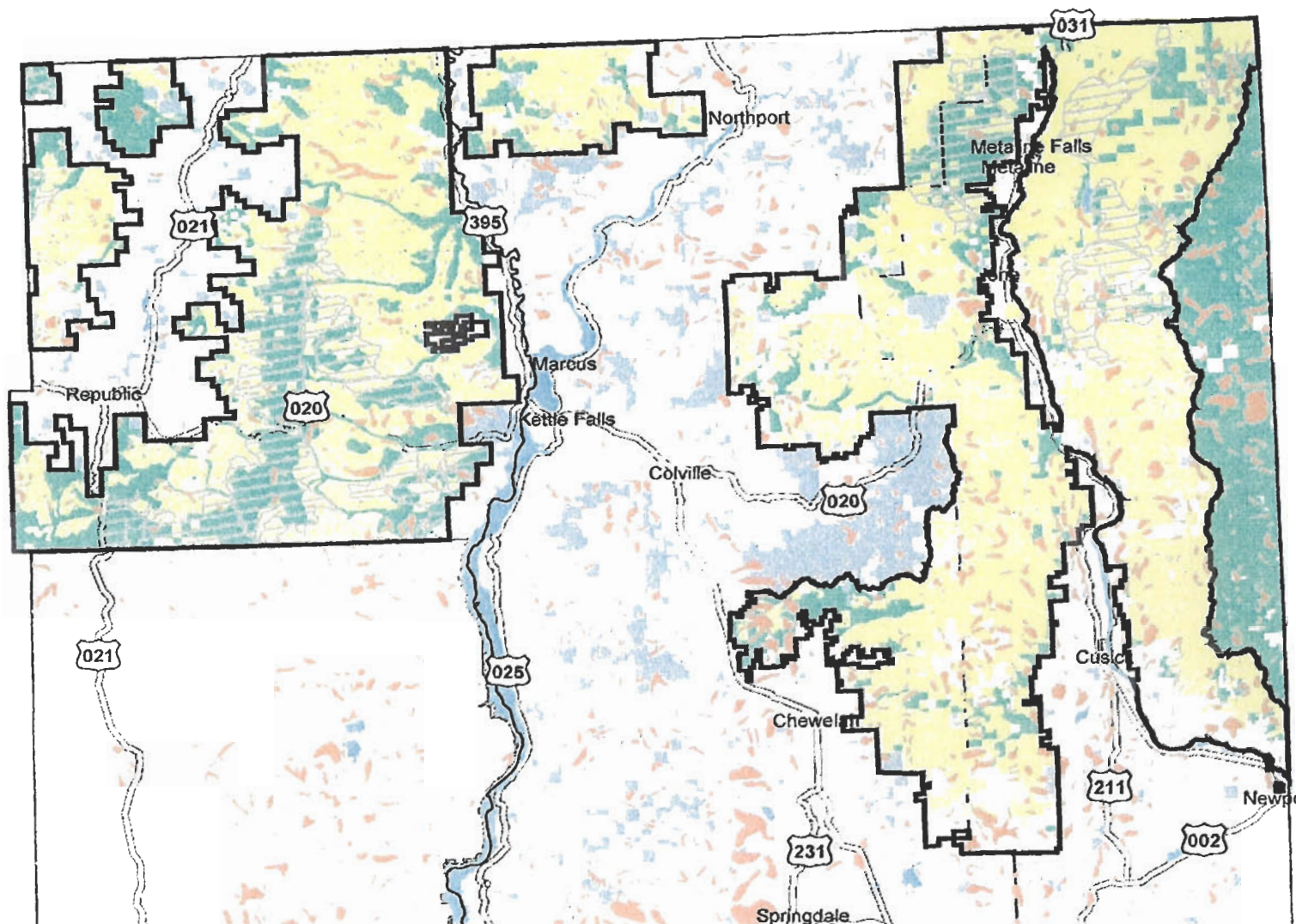
- Private non-industrial landowners that use professional assistance costs \$25 → \$30/MBF. This includes all sale preparation, marketing, sale administration, and supervision of subsequent management activities.

Question 6: **Look at TFPA (Tribal Forest Protection Act) and the opportunities it provides.** This question would best be directed to tribal interests and Forest Service personnel.

Question 7: **What are the opportunities for collaboration with state, private and tribal?** The previously mentioned Forest Health Study Group identified the “need for a cooperative atmosphere across ownerships on forest health, and a collaborative approach among private, public and tribal land owners, forest health professionals, community wildfire protection planning groups, and other interested parties to achieve cross boundary results”. An integral key with cooperation and collaboration is “comprehensive data and information are available so that landowners, policy makers, and the public can understand existing and developing forest health conditions, identify areas of greatest treatment need and effectively communicate practical remedies to forest managers, policy making and the public”. This is lacking. Barriers to cooperation include differing time line requirements (the Forest Service is generally recognized to require more time to implement a project), differing land use policies, a lack of consistent data and data analysis processes among various agencies and landowner/manager groups, a lack of resources in terms of personnel and expenses to effectively communicate and collaborate, and the previously discussed transient key personnel. (See Maps 3 and 4 which demonstrate efforts of DNR and USFS to coordinate activities spatially).

- Recommendations: As previously stated, the time requirements of the Forest Service are excessive, relative to other landowner groups. While HFI and HFRA were designed to streamline the process, additional opportunities to streamline may exist and should be pursued.
- Funding for data gathering and constructing consistent risk analysis processes by the various agencies is not available. Continue to fund organizations like Rural Technology Initiative (RTI) in facilitating assembly of cohesive strategies, data collection, gap analysis, and technology transfer among landowners/managers.
- There are opportunities for funding for cooperative groups through grants and donations by interested parties. However, these funding sources are not consistent. Additionally, funding for state coordinator positions are subject to State budgeting processes. Perhaps Congress should look at a matching fund concept to enable collaboration and participation by the various governmental stakeholders. I believe that it is evident through the formation of the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, and the involvement of the Colville Tribe in the State’s Forest Health Study Group Report and Washington State’s Strategic Plan for Health Forest that there are opportunities to collaborate effectively if resources are available to the stakeholders.

- Question 8: **What would the USFS like to see happen under these acts if identified obstacles were not an issue?** This question is directed towards the Forest Service.
- Question 9: **What, if any, disconnects exist within the agency that create roadblocks to implementation of HFI, HFRA, TFPA, etc.** I am not sure of the connotation of disconnects. I have previously mentioned the lack of planning monies through stewardship as a barrier. I also see the narrow interpretation of what can take place as a categorical exclusion under HFI as an impediment to accomplishing the goals of HFRA. Specifically, during discussions regarding the Bangs Mountain Project on the Colville National Forest, which is primarily a fuels reduction project, the interpretation was such that larger forest health issues (insects and diseases) are not addressed unless the removal of those trees reduces dead fuels over the short term. In other words, trees that will die in the next very few years because of current disease problems are not removed because they aren't quite dead yet. This project area will have to be revisited with redundant and unnecessary expense and time consumption in the very near future as diseased trees continue to die and contribute to hazardous fuel loading. Additionally, the concept of an upper diameter limit, regardless of the individual trees' health and/or stocking levels of the stand, does not allow accomplishment of the goals of HFI or HFRA, as previously seen in the comparison between various landowner treatment methodologies. (See Question #5 which includes pictures of the Burnt Valley Stewardship Project for examples).
- Question 10: **Showcase the efforts that are ongoing on the Colville National Forest and elsewhere.** See Question #5.
- Question 11: **Any barriers to implementing stewardship?** New programs need to be designed to succeed. Some people have the impression the Forest Service personnel use the "sink or swim" approach which includes too many costly "nice to do or experimental" tasks in the stewardship contracts. My opinion is, when embarking on a new program such as this, that the obvious "economical" and accomplishable projects should be done first to encourage additional participation and allow the development of processes and technology to flourish. "Loading up" stewardship projects with expensive, time consuming tasks will not benefit the stewardship program. They will decrease the potential bidders pool and cause potential bidders to lose money and interest in the stewardship concept.

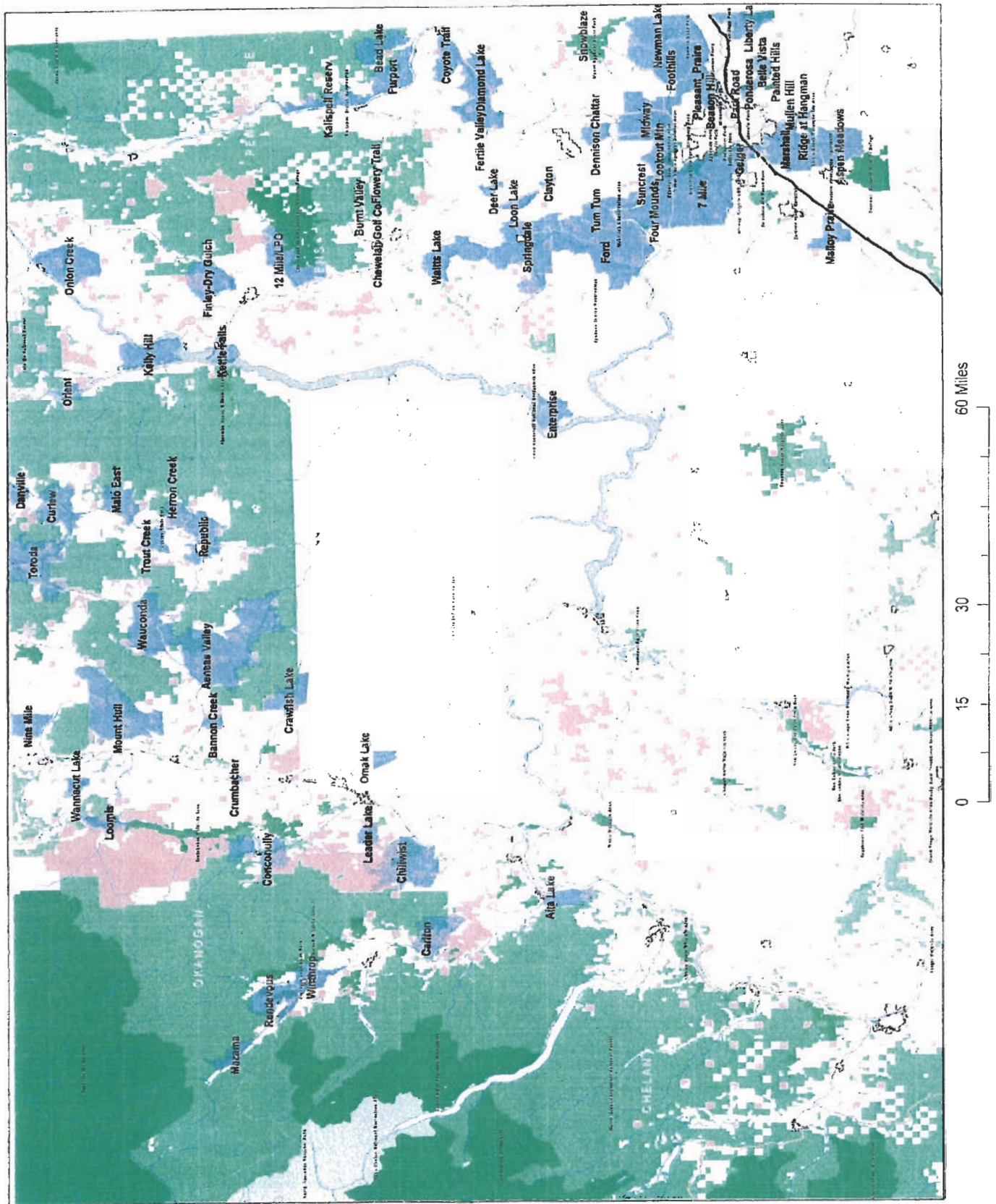


1 inch equals 11.71 miles

Communities At Risk From Wildfire

Northeast Region DNR

Map #2



Map #3

Arden Forest Health

